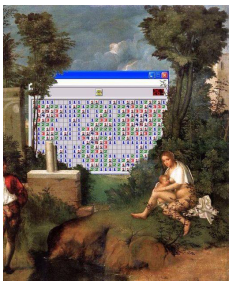


A Master's Thesis by Sara Confalonieri

Remix Party

Remix practices
for cultural heritage
in the digital age



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Printed at Aalto University Print Lab
Bound at Kirjansitomo V. & K. Jokinen

Helsinki, 2016

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This thesis looks into remix practices as a way to engage with cultural heritage in the digital age. The research explores themes of open knowledge, intellectual property and remix culture, through media theories, case studies and interviews.

Remix Party is an idea of shared experience of remix, it is a way to discover cultural heritage and take ownership of it through its direct manipulation.

The project is a design attempt to make the material of Finnish digital archives more accessible. This was done by designing a narrative environment to introduce people to the subject matter and a digital tool for remixing images from the archives of Helsinki City Museum.

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Structure

This thesis is divided in three main parts, which consist of an introduction to the discourse, an exploration of remix culture and the project Remix Party.

The introduction outlines the current state of the heritage sector and the implications of the digitization of cultural material. This section is important to understand how the context of open knowledge discourses and activism shaped this thesis. In this part I also present the research questions and methods.

In the second part I narrow down the focus by presenting a general background of the concept of remix. This research was developed in order to understand the potential of remix culture and its relationship with copyright activism. This section includes an analysis of the discourses of the major media theorists in the field and of a selection of cases studies through history.

The last part illustrates the concept behind the Remix Party project and its production. This is done by documenting and analysing the design process, from the research methods to the design choices. The thesis ends with an analysis of the outcomes of the project and its possible development for future investigations.

Interests and experience

My interest for the cultural heritage sector began during cross-department studies at Aalto University and an exchange at Central Saint Martins. During that period I joined courses and lectures that investigated contemporary museum practices. Each of them provided a different angle on the topic and thought me different tools to critically approach cultural heritage.

In the Art Education department I attended a practice-based course focused on museum pedagogy. During the course we regularly visited exhibitions in Helsinki and experimented different methods to open a dialogue between art and the public. During the visits we organised workshops targeted to diverse audience groups and I practiced myself how to be an art guide. Being in contact with art educators allowed me to slow down my thinking and consider how different perspectives can coexist in the same space. During the course we tackled social issues, questions of accessibility and speculated the future of art education for museums.

During that year, I was also following a course in the New Media department focused on digital strategies for cultural heritage. The course consisted of a series of lectures and a collaborative project. This experience gave me an overview

of the current state of the digital museum, unfolding the steps needed for designing a digital strategy for cultural heritage, including curatorial and media challenges.

Later on during the exchange at the Central Saint Martins I joined a multidisciplinary team of students and academics in a program called Narrative Environments. During the course I practiced participatory and action-based design research methods to create visitor experiences.

The projects I worked on dealt with urban and community environments with particular attention to stories. Those were used throughout the design process to include audiences and make sense of places. The briefs were incredibly challenging and thought be the importance of experimentation and collaboration.

These studies outside my department deeply affected my thinking and practice as a designer. During the collaborative projects I often had to freeze my status as a graphic designer to become a writer, curator, educator, spatial designer and sometimes even a project manager. I was some sort of liquid designer, adapting my skills and compensating my knowledge when necessary. These experiences inspired me to push the boundaries of my design practice to explore new areas of knowledge. For the project of my thesis I tried to further investigated participatory techniques and look for design opportunities in the cultural sector.

Sharing is caring

The context

In the past years various museums and other cultural institutions started opening up their collections by releasing high resolutions images, metadata and the copyrights of the artefacts into the public domain. The creation of digital archives, gives the artefacts a greater global exposure and also changes the way people interact with each other (Sanderhoff, 2014). Working via the internet easily allows the flow of information and can be very effective in preserving, transmitting and remixing cultural heritage.

These developments are a clear sign of a shift of mentality that is happening among institutions and decision makers. Firstly, by sharing their authority

and empowering the audience, they revolutionise the traditional role of the author and curator, creating a rather flexible ecosystem. Secondly and optimistically, by promoting reuse of content, they open up a new range of social, cultural and learning opportunities (Simon, 2010).

In this context various museums have been looking for new ways to organise and visualise the enormous amount of artefacts and data available on their websites. From pedagogical to editorial approaches, these experiments are making culture and its derivatives more accessible, as well as trying to engage with a broader audience.

Concurrently to this, more informal initiatives such as hackathons and artist residencies, have been promoted in order to engage designers and developers to explore new possible usages of the digital heritage material.

This phenomenon is part of larger discourse that promotes open knowledge and is taking place in the entire cultural sector. Leading the way is Open GLAM*, an initiative that supports free and open access to digital cultural heritage by providing guidance and connecting galleries, libraries, archives and museums.

The Open GLAM network connects many institutions and academics across the globe, but there are also other networks and forms of activism happening among circles of artists, librarians and intellectuals. The attitudes and positions taken on the concept of property vary a lot, with piracy being the most extreme response to the issue.

*Open GLAM encourages the use of Creative Commons licences. In particular the – Creative Commons Zero Universal Public Domain Dedication (CC0 waiver) – that allows a complete re-use of metadata without any restrictions.

Why remix?

First hypothesis and research questions

The act of manipulating and remixing images is as old as the hills, just think about acts of censorship, camouflages or even guerrilla interventions in the public space. This practice is at the core of various artists and designers' process, but it is also largely performed by everyone else, thanks to digital technologies and the internet. Phenomenon like internet memes confirmed that little transformations can easily produce captivating narratives and engage large audiences.

This thesis looks at remix practices as a way to engage with cultural heritage in the digital age. My interest for remix culture developed after

reading about copyright issues and the related forms of activism promoting open and shared culture. On one hand the practice of remix seemed a natural way to challenge those restrictions, considering how it is widely performed and accepted by professionals across industries, especially in the music and art sector.

On the other hand I thought remix could also be used as a participatory technique to bring people closer to cultural heritage.

Remix I believe, can be a playful way to actively manipulate cultural heritage material that in reality is absolutely untouchable. It can also disrupt the original narrative of an object, or add a new layer to it – in both cases the result is a new hybrid cultural artefact with a narrative that links past and present together. Through remix people can express their creativity, but also their ideas, for instance some people use remix as a way to communicate and impact society. Overall, I believe remix can make cultural heritage more accessible.

How is image manipulation driven by discourses of copyrights and open knowledge?

Can remix practices serve as a participatory technique to engage people in re-using the cultural material available in digital archives?

How to remix cultural heritage?

Further thoughts and research questions

As mentioned, many cultural institutions involved in the open knowledge discourse, have been researching new ways to engage people in using the digital heritage material available online.

The digital collections are free of the physical and time restrictions of exhibition halls and archives, therefore they are not to be thought as a mere extension of the physical repositories. They are virtual environments and they enable a completely new range of interactions.

In order to design new user experiences for digital cultural heritage, it is important to reflect on how a digital reproduction differs from the original

artefact and how a virtual environment affects our perception of it.

When digital reproductions of artefacts are published online, they enter an environment that is already highly saturated with visual material. Everyday we are inundated by an infinite amount of digital images and probably only through a physical encounter such as the installation “24 Hrs in Photos” created by Erik Kessels, we can perceive the extent of this exposure.



In 2011 Erik Kessels printed all the images that were uploaded on Flickr during a single day. The result is mountains of photos that invaded the gallery [FOAM Amsterdam 2011-2012].

In the last decades our visual perception has changed deeply, partly due to accessible technologies that allow us to reproduce anything and partly to the search engines and social networks that contribute to the dissemination of images around the web. Online images exist as a network of images, they travel, they are constantly manipulated and re-contextualised.

Whether printed or digital, a reproduction is not just a copy, it is a form of metamorphosis of the original artwork and context. When reproduced the artwork undergoes a transformation, it loses some attributes, like its materiality, but also finds new associations with other artworks, producing a new environment.

As Antonio Battro (2010) suggests, by liberating artworks of their physicality, the invention of photography and modern technology enabled the birth of a new form of museum. A museum that doesn't require walls, a *musée imaginaire*,

as the art theorists André Malraux envisioned already sixty years ago. Today, thanks to digital reproduction, we can easily concretise Malraux's idea of museum in the virtual museum.

How can we re-direct cultural heritage towards contemporary habits and digital interactions?

How to remix images?

Remix

Roots and theory

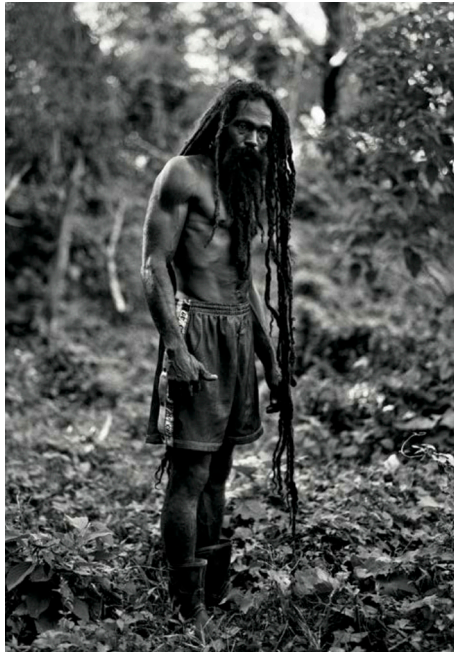
The concept of remix is commonly associated with the music industry and the sampling culture that began in the 70s in New York City. Today remix culture ties into a larger trend of remix that encompasses different sectors and employees various forms of media.

In the music industry there are various forms of remix that challenge the copyright law and produce interesting music experiments, for example the popular collages made out of other musicians' clips by the D.J. Girl Talk.

In literature we can find provocative publications such as "Reality Hunger" by David Shields, a manifesto for a new hybrid genre composed by mixing several quotes one after the other without citing the authors.

In the visual arts there are plenty of examples, only the book "Appropriation", published by the Whitechapel Gallery in London, collects dozens of conversations and essays about different types of art appropriation. Those are carried out by various artists through history, from Dadaists and Situationists to contemporary media artists.

In some borderline situations remixing can lead to plagiarism issues. An emblematic case is the ‘Cariou vs Prince’ from 2007. The artist Richard Prince was sued by the photographer Patrick Cariou for reusing his photographs in a series of collages. What probably has sparked the discussion is the value of the original artefact versus the remix. The price of the original book containing the photographs was worth 60 dollars, while each collage was sold for as much as \$2.43 million. The debate went on for a long time and involved museums and photo agencies, such as Getty Images, who were taking parts in the lawsuit (Colors Magazine, 2013).



The original photograph by Patrick Cariou



The collage by artist Richard Prince

Defining remix is not simple, each industry and community has different levels of acceptance. As in the ‘Cariou vs Prince’ case, this practice often raises questions of authenticity, authorship and copyright. Eduardo Navas and Lawrence Lessing are perhaps the major theorists that have explored remix culture in detail.

Eduardo Navas is an academic, author of “Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling” and co-editor of “The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies”. He also developed several projects and published critical texts that deal with remix in art, media and culture, with a focus on its creative and political role.

Lawrence Lessing is a professor of law and one of the founders of Creative Commons, a non-profit organisation devoted to the sharing and development of knowledge and creativity in the digital era (Creative Commons, 2016). He also published the books “Free Culture” and “Remix”, which give a great contribution to the intellectual property discourse.

Defining remix

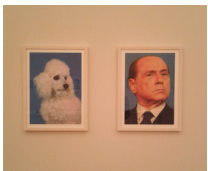
In order to define remix, Navas (2012) goes through its roots in music and defines three types of remix: Extended, Selective, Reflexive and Regenerative. The first type, as the word suggests, is a longer version of a song, which he compares in literature to publications such as the Reader’s Digest. A Selective Remix instead consists of the addition or subtraction of parts from the original composition, in this case he gives the example of Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain.



(1) "Adolf, the Superman, Swallows Gold and Spouts Tin", John Heartfield, 1932.



(2) An intervention by Ich bin Barbara, 2016. Translated "Switch off racism day and night" – the original sign said "Please keep car entrance/exit free day and night".



(3) From 2012, an exhibition in Italy by Joachim Schmid (former Italian prime minister Berlusconi in the right frame).

The third type described by Navas (2012), Reflexive, is a more complex form of remix and is more relevant to this research as it is allegorical and challenges the aura of the original piece. This can be an effective critical tool, well represented by John Heartfield, the pioneer of modern photomontage. Between the 1920-40s the artist took various press photographs and decontextualised them to create new contentious messages against the Fascist propaganda (1).

A recent interesting case of Reflexive Remix is the one by the anonymous artist Ich bin Barbara, that operates on the streets in Germany. The artist alters the original texts of road signs to compose provocative statements that criticise racist and unsustainable behaviours (2).

Also, Joachim Schmid, well-known for his practices of re-using of other people's photographs, in his books and exhibitions often decontextualizes images by juxtaposing them with others and producing new narratives (3).

The list could go on forever. Thanks to the accessibility of digital media and large archives of images, this kind of remix now happens quite often and not necessarily by artists.

Amateur remixers can easily be found on social networks, where memes and parodies are the routine. Some of those experiments can also turn into a long term practice, like the popular Facebook page "Sei i quadri potessero parlare" (translated "If paintings could talk"), that gives an ironic and desecrating voice to old masterpieces by adding a line of text over them with Snapchat (4).

The last form of remix, described by Navas (2015) as Regenerative, is particularly interesting for digital archives of

cultural heritage, as it "consists of juxtaposing two or more elements that are constantly updated, meaning that they are designed to change according to data flow" (Navas, 2015). In this case he gives the example of Wikipedia, where entries are regularly reviewed and modified by users.

I believe another interesting case of Regenerative Remix is Museum of Internet, a self-reflective caricature of what is the internet nowadays (Gervais, Magal, 2015). The archive, curated by the young artists Emilie Gervais and Felix Magal, collects the contemporary iconography that is produced on the web by allowing anyone to add images to their website (5). From art pieces to images of pop culture and pure nonsense, the content of the website is unpredictable, as it is uncensored and in continuous flow. The archive itself places this diverse content on the same level, attributing the same kind of "aura" to each of them.

All these different forms of appropriation are significant, as Navas (2012) concludes, because they engage people in playing the role of "prosumer" of culture (consumer + producer), rather than just being consumers.

Lawrence Lessing in his book "Remix" has similar thoughts on the active role of people in the production of culture. His approach however is different, as he starts from a different context to describe the concept remix and then focuses on the significance of remix in pedagogical scenarios.

He first focuses on the contrast between Read/Only (RO) and Read/Write (RW) culture, terminology used in computer technology. He describes remix as a collage that



(4) Translated "Do you accept meal vouchers?", Stefano Guerra, 2015.



(5) Anonymous collage from the archive of Museum of Internet

derives from the combination of elements of RO culture and succeeds “by leveraging the meaning created by the reference to build something new” (Lessing, 2008, p. 80).

The significance of remix

Lessing (2008) then reflects on the significance of remix, illustrating how remix fosters communities of producers that support each other, which in the digital age don’t even have territorial limits. He also claims that remix can be a form of interest-driven education. He suggests that rather than being condemned as copying, remix should be promoted in schools, as the appropriation of pre-existing cultural material is always an enriching experience.

Lessing (2008) strongly points out that the current copyright law should be reformed in order to favour the development of digital remix. Remix is for him an ubiquitous form of cultural production that was always present in the past and has now emerged more strongly with digitization.

The idea of common being intrinsic to the particular type of production that is remix, is also discussed by the media theorists Jussi Parikka and Paul Caplan. In the essay “Digital Common Space”, published in the book “Digital Public Spaces” in 2013, they reflect on the affordance of remixability of the digital public space.

The theorists suggests how in the digital public space the archive is a contested zone, on one side is private and protected by rights, and on the other is common and open. Archive as a commodity versus archive as a source.

A source for artists, but also for everyone else who uses digital devices (Parikka, Caplan 2013). In our daily life we continuously manipulate and share information in the form of text, images or whatsoever nature. Culture is in perpetual mutation, so remixability can only be thought as an omnipresent attribute.

To conclude, remix can be described as a creative practice of expression that has different extensions and is driven by different motifs, from aesthetic to critical. This exploration of remix is to be considered partial, the theorists mentioned are only a small portion of the community that investigates remix studies.

In the context of my research, remix is seen as a practice to make digital cultural heritage more accessible, by engaging the public in manipulating visual material from local archives.

In the second part of this chapter there are three conversations I had with contemporary creatives who started remixing images for different reasons. The results of their work are incredibly captivating digital archives that I think can serve as an inspiration to cultural institutions and future remixers.

Ridiculous Renaissance Art

A conversation with the author of Scorpion Dagger

James Kerr

You started Scorpion Dagger back in 2012 and now have an enormous collection of GIFs and also a recently published book. How did everything start? and what is this practice for you now?



It all started as a means for me to learn how to animate. A friend gave me a little tutorial on making animations on Photoshop, and started fiddling around from there. At the time, I was desperately looking for a new art project to dive into, and figured it would be fun to make some of my paper and glue collages come to life. Whenever I'd finish a little video (usually about 2 to 3 seconds long), I'd email them to some of my friends, and one of them suggested that rather exporting them as videos, it would make way more sense to turn them into GIFs. Once that happened, I was hooked, and quickly came up with the idea to make one GIF a day for a year and try to find a gallery show once it was done.

I kept a pretty solid pace, making close to 350 GIFs that first year, and slowly began building a following. I was having too much fun to drop it, and decided to keep pumping them out. At some point, I started getting pretty regular requests for commissions for either commercial or editorial work, and that's where I find myself now. I sort of wish the commission work would slow down a little so I could get back to making these things for fun, but, like everyone, I have to pay the bills. My hope is to one day find a place where I could do a few jobs a year, and spend the rest of my time exploring the animation a little deeper.

One of your commissions was the remix of a portrait by John Brett from Tate Britain's collection at the occasion of the 1840s GIF party. Which is not one of the most iconic paintings of that period and is now probably more memorable thanks to your GIF. What about other commissions, especially the commercial ones, did they involve the remix of cultural heritage material as well?



Part of the remix of John Brett's *Lady With a Dove*

The vast majority of the commission work I get are from people who ask me to do the work in my style. Seeing as a lot of it is commercial, I worry about sourcing the paintings and copyrights a lot more than I do with Scorpio Dagger. Generally speaking, with commercial work, the representations are not straight-up from specific paintings. Like, for example, I did some animation for a documentary on Iggy and The Stooges, and the vision I had for the characters was to have them be collages from many different

Renaissance paintings. As an example, I used 3 or 4 different noses from various paintings, and pasted together to make one. Almost everything I do is a collage from the paintings, so in a sense they are all remixes from cultural heritage material even if they are unrecognizable.



Gif made for 4newswall

Regarding your independent practice, on your website you mention that your collages are mostly made of Northern and Early Renaissance paintings. Was there a particular reason why you started working on those?

I just really like the paintings from that era. The way I see it, Lucas Cranach the Elder is such a fun painter, whether he intended to be or not. The characters in his paintings are almost comical. There's also Bosch, who is something else all together. I don't what it is, but there's a certain unrefined characteristic to the paintings that really speaks to me. I don't like precision or perfection. I'm not crazy about the symmetry and realism you find in later renaissance paintings.

Scorpion Dagger is strongly embedded in social networks. You publish your collages on Tumblr, Facebook, Giphy and other platforms where anyone can freely share, re-use and disseminate them around the web. On the internet the difference between amateurs and professionals is blurred, people remix and publish material all the time.

How do contemporary digital interactions affect your practice? and how do you feel about intellectual property and the re-appropriation of your work?

I've never really considered that blurred line between amateur and professional before, but it's absolutely spot on. For the longest time, I was making these GIFs while working a full-time job. I would come home from work, crack a beer, and work on something for a bunch of hours. I'd do this everyday. Some people assumed that I was getting paid for posting on social media, which is the furthest thing from the truth. I haven't seen a dime from any of the GIFs you see on my Tumblr or Instagram (unless I specifically repost something from a commissioned job, but it's rare that I share those). Now, I'm fortunate enough to be able to live off freelance animation jobs. It's kind of both a curse and a blessing – I wish I had more time to make GIFs for the hell of it, like I was doing before, but at the same it's awesome working for myself. I'm really hoping to find a good balance between 'art' and 'work' soon.

I guess how the digital interactions affect my practice, is the more I post, the more people contact me for collaborations, commissions, etc...

A cynical perspective on this would be that social media has become somewhat like a business card. I need to post to drum up more business. Funny thing is, I'm dying to have some free time to make GIFs for fun, but my problem is that I have a really hard time saying no and often find myself overwhelmed with all the work on my plate. But, on the flip side, I get to meet some really interesting, fun people from all over the world. I really can't complain about much here.



As for the intellectual property and re-appropriation of my work, it used to bother me a lot more. One thing I still don't understand is why certain pages routinely remove the source when they share content? Generally speaking, they are aggregate pages that don't create original content, but are trying to make it seem like they do. It's strange. On a whole, it doesn't bother me too too much. In a sense, I'm grabbing my source work from the public domain, messing with it, and often posting without sourcing the original creators so I'm fine when people do it to me.

Museums, libraries and other cultural institutions are nowadays promoting open knowledge by releasing their collection into the public domain and trying to find novel ways to engage the public. Scorpion Dagger succeeds in that, your collages remix and disrupt the narrative of the Renaissance paintings, producing new hilarious, provocative and addictive short stories. Your practice started out as a personal artistic exploration, then visibility and collaborations grew, how do you position yourself now in relation to the network of open knowledge activists?

I'm a huge fan of anyone working to get more images out into the public domain. I've had a few people reach out to me asking to use my work in presentations to certain institutions about the potential of opening up their collections, and I'm always happy to oblige.



Invisible connections

A conversation with the author
of B4-XVI and old_art_is_gr8

Cecilia Azcarate



In your work you often manipulate cultural heritage, especially paintings from the 15th century, by juxtaposing it with the imagery of contemporary pop culture and internet behaviours. What led you to embark upon this path?

I just really like to look at art and pop culture on my internet and books and twitter. I wake up very early and look at stuff for hours it's kind of a meditation for me, and I just started making lols out of it, or comments, or connections I guess. None of this is very serious. I enjoy finding common threads, signs of a timeless human condition maybe? timeless swags, beauty and lols.

You also curate the Instagram account [old_art_is_gr8](#) which contains quite an interesting collection of paintings, very expressive ones! Do you have background in the field of art? Where do you find those artworks, online or in museums? and how do you select them?



Yes, it's all the same process, I look at a lot of stuff and some catches my attention for different reasons, some I want to share cause I know other people will enjoy them, some I keep in a folder, some go in a book I'm making with all my little discovery. I used Google Arts Project, the Met Museum website, the Prado, and then I try to find the best resolution possible online. I also look at lots of books, try not to buy all

of them :) When I find detail I like I read about it a little bit, I'm not very good at reading so it has to be very short, and if I find a story I like it share it or I just make up a good joke sometimes it works. Didn't study arts no, but I do work in the creative industry.

Timeless swags, beauty and lols. This is great!

Also, "Highlighting an invisible conversation between hip hop and art before the 16th century", I like how you described the B4-XVI project. Those visual associations definitely reveal a common eccentricity and vanity that seems to bridge a huge historical and cultural gap. They also bridge a gap between art experts and ordinary people, the amateurs, the Millennials... . Even if you describe your practice as a hobby, can you consider yourself as a sort of mediator? What kind of work do you do in the creative industry? and does it influence these projects?

I'm a creative director in a global agency called Sidlee. I work a lot for brands, I did a big campaign for Apple lately, I did digital work for Y3, worked a lot for Calvin Klein, Google etc. I also work for artists, we are now doing the launch of an up and coming artist [...]. We also built a radio station that only works on the Williamsburg bridge here in NY and plays one song when you go up and one song when you go down. It's lol. So a mix of work for money and work for fun and both I'm very lucky. I'm not sure what I am really, it's a good question :) making things for the internet is what it says on my tinder lol.

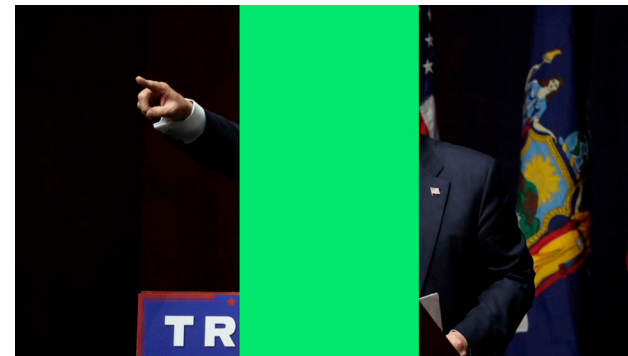
Remix as a form of activism

A conversation about #trumpblock

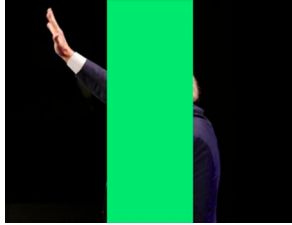
Juan Arturo Garcia

What is #trumpblock?

In visual terms, the project consists of scraping the internet looking for pictures of Donald Trump, and then consistently do one action to them: draw a green [#69e877] rectangle that blocks his face but allows everything else to be seen.



The #trumpblock project is an exploration in propaganda. As an exercise, it intends to look at the contemporary strategies of mass communication, fame and discourse-as-reality.



I guess the intention is to create some sort of visual representation of Trump's discourses, pitches, and ideas. An infographic of sorts. With the catch that his words are actually not complex at all, everything is very basic and simple about him. This simplistic approach was intentionally what caught people's attention, then made him catchy, and finally so prevalent on media outlets, by repeating over and over again the same arguments, no matter the context, the questions asked, or anything, really.

The #trumpblock is a parallel gesture to the same one-trick pony approach to politics that we are seeing these days.

Also, by blocking his face on every photo, you suddenly emphasize the rest of Donald Trump's visual economy: the suits, the women, the spectacle... the stuff that his campaign is made of.



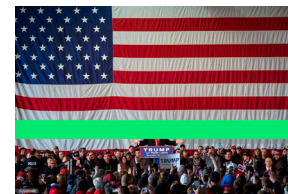
Why did you start?

The #trumpblock project is the outcome of a workshop with Metahaven's Daniel van der Velden, as a part of the Second Thoughts programme (secondthoughts.mx). It was started by three mexican graphic designers (Emilio Pérez, Íñigo López, and myself).

It all started by the constant (and loud!) coverage of Donald Trump's intentions of building a wall between the US and Mexico, amongst other nasty stuff that he's been saying about our country and latin people in general.

We were tackling the question of how to do something about it; we certainly were not the first, but everything that was published about Trump, even very bad articles and whatnot, only made him stronger. Mediawise, the Trump phenomenon gets stronger with positive and negative coverage, as well as with memes and everything else, as it is basically keeping him as the subject of the conversation.

How can we make something that does not make him stronger, even if we try to make fun or ridicule him?



We thought that maybe just overlaying a green block, a color that has no obvious meaning, might do the trick.

Reflections

I began these interviews with the scope of learning more about contemporary remix practices and their connection with open knowledge discourses.

The three practices discussed in the previous pages are all quite different from each other, but they have in common the creation of digital archives as a result of the remix.

The archives add temporality and sociality to the remix practice. The users follow the archives and wait for new content, sometimes they can also add material to the archive, making the practice participatory. The repetition of even a simple transformation, such as the #trumpblock green shape or the juxtapositions in B4-XVI, makes the remix a practice and not just an occasional action.

Through time and repetition, the archive makes the remix and its narrative memorable.

Through these conversations I learned that remix can be done in different ways. The technique is not important, but rather the narrative that is created. The creatives I interviewed use very simple strategies to remix images, they first select images from various archives and then re-contextualise them through simple transformations.

James Kerr combines different parts of paintings together, Cecilia Azcarate creates juxtapositions and in #trumpblock parts of the original images are hidden. These transformations are very simple, they don't require extraordinary skills, just good ideas.

The projects reveal the opportunities that remix gives. Remix can be an occasion to start a creative practice without a conventional artistic education, it can be used as an educational tool or even as a form of activism in the case of #trumpblock.

For example, Cecilia Azcarate through her images publishes little doses of history of art. As she mentioned she has no previous education in the field, but enjoys researching new material in museums collections and making connections with contemporary culture. Her light and informal approach reaches many people on social networks.

Surprisingly both James Kerr (except the mentioned brief collaboration with Tate Britain) and Cecilia Azcarate, who work with paintings from heritage collections on daily basis, don't have a direct connection with the open knowledge network. Their work, I believe is a fine example of how digital heritage can be revitalised and communicated to broader audiences. James Kerr's GIFs are fun to watch and don't require a lot of time or attention. They place cultural heritage in the same context of the memes or funny videos people watch in their free time. Perhaps after seeing his GIFs one will look at the characters of Early Renaissance paintings with different eyes.

The case of #trumblock derives from a more contemporary context, comparing to the previous projects that involve the use of cultural heritage.

This interview was carried out to understand how remix can also be used in a critical way.

The authors of #trumblock found a way to enter the political discourse through visual communication.

This case, just like those discussed in remix theory, shows how sometimes images can replace words and be as powerful.

These conversations were a good method to explore contemporary remix culture with a down-to-earth approach. They helped me reflect on how I could develop my project, specifically how people could digitally remix material from Finnish archives. The interviews were later used to introduce the subject matter of my thesis to the public (see next chapter).

Remix Party

The concept

The idea of a 'Remix Party' began while I was working on a tool for remixing digital cultural heritage. At that time I felt the need of testing the prototype and also how people responded to my research. I then started planning an environment that would introduce people to remix culture and where they could also try to remix cultural heritage from museums digital archives. I decided to call the event 'Remix Party work-in-progress' to emphasise that it was a playful and shared experience and also an ongoing process.

Remix Party is an idea of shared experience of remix, which can be interpreted as a feast or as community of remixers. It is a way to explore cultural heritage and take ownership of it through its direct manipulation.

This manipulation happens online and is inspired by contemporary digital interactions. Everyone is welcome to join the party and remix artefacts from digital archives to create new hybrid images. It is a space to have fun and express ideas without censorship or judgement.

In this occasion I decided to develop Remix Party in the local context. The event was organised in Helsinki and people could remix a selection of material from Finnish digital archives.

This framework can however vary, in the future Remix Party could treat a more diverse range of material, not necessarily from the same archive, and perhaps target more specific thematics to enable a discussion.

Remix Party at Magito Gallery

A narrative environment

Location and audience



Remix Party took place at Magito Gallery in Suvilahti during Helsinki Day 2016. The gallery is a small part of Magito Studio, which occasionally hosts small exhibitions. It is not a conventional gallery, but rather a quite rough space, just like the surrounding area, a former power plant now used for festivals and cultural events.

Prior to choosing this location, I contemplated other environments and contacted several exhibition spaces around Helsinki. One of the first options was to host the event in one of the galleries at Aalto University. This option was soon discarded, because the audience would have been restricted to local students and personnel. Other galleries around Helsinki also offered nice spaces, but the location was again not easily accessible to the public, or at least restricted to people from the art and design field.



Luckily I got in touch with with Ossi Kajas, one of the owners of Magito Studio. After talking about the project with him, it seemed that Helsinki Day, a festive occasion that would attract a lot of people to Suvilahti, was the perfect context to insert Remix Party and interact with a broader audience. The space was open to the public on Sunday 12th of June 2016 between 12am and 7pm.

Before the event I published information about the event on social networks, attached posters around the city and signage in SuviLahti. Thanks to the particular occasion of Helsinki Day, Magito gallery served as an informal space where anyone could spontaneously stop by. Most of the people that visited the party found out about it once in the area. The audience was therefore highly variegated and only a small portion from my age group or design network.

The event was a form of action research that allowed me to collect feedback on my project while it was still in progress. Testing a project for the public with a participatory approach seemed the best way to proceed.

Case study

A similar methodology can be found in the project Copyshop by the collective of artists Superflex. Copyshop was open in Copenhagen for a couple of years as a forum to challenge intellectual property and investigate the phenomena of copying (Superflex, 2016). During that time it became a gathering point for people that shared a common critical view on the theme.

Superflex is part of a new generation of artists that “makes copying a positive artistic agenda” (Teilmann, 2007, p. 69). The collective is well known for their resistance to corporate monopolies and intellectual property. What distinguishes the group from other forms of activism in the same field is their use of the language and techniques of business. At Copyshop for example, various “supercopies” of commercial products, such as drinks and clothes, were available for sale.



The entrance of Copyshop in Copenhagen, 2005.



Inside Copyshop in Copenhagen, 2005.

This method allows the artists to enter the corporate world as activists without being seen as protesters (Bloom, 2007).

What I find interesting about the project by Superflex is that the shop at first sight looked just like a real copyshop. Only once inside the visitors would realise that it was in fact something more. I think that the incognito mode of their artistic practice facilitated new encounters and unexpected developments of their investigation.

The decision of calling my event 'Remix Party' was perhaps inspired by that project. My research and intervention was dressed up as a party. The environment and visual communication was designed with the characteristics of a party. Once inside the visitor would find a very visual environment, with projections and a lot of images. The roughness of the interiors and low cost material used probably also contributed to give a relaxed and unofficial feeling to the space. A couch, an armchair and some chairs were present in the room with some drinks and snacks to invite people to get comfortable.

The form and identity of Remix Party can be further explored in future occasions, in order to bring cultural heritage and remix practices in other social contexts. For budget reasons in this case the event lasted only one day, with more time available it would be perhaps easier to enable a discussion about remix culture and foster a community of remixers.

Before discussing further the outcomes of the Remix Party, I will go through the design process and visitor experience.

Design process

The making of Remix Party was a multidisciplinary, collaborative and experimental process.

Multidisciplinary because it required pedagogical methods, skills of visual communication, spatial design and interaction design. Museum pedagogy methods were used to plan the interaction with the public and the typology of language used for the communication. Visual communication, which is my main discipline was used in various contexts, from printed matter, to the layout designs for the remix application and also to curate the image of the event on social networks. To design the environment, I first planned the visitor experience and then researched the material needed for the event. For the remix application I used basic methods of interaction design, from the sketches of the wireframes to the final layouts of the app. As mentioned in the preface of the book, during my minor studies I was able to dig into other disciplines, which were of great help during the organisation and design of this project. Nonetheless my skills are limited, so finding collaborators was essential for this project.

Beside Ossi Kajas from Magito Gallery, who lend me his space during the event, Lisa Lee, a colleague from the department, helped me to move and set up the equipment in the environment. She also was in charge of documenting the event with photographs, while I was guiding the visitors. Palash Mukhopadhyay, an interaction designer and student from the New Media department, was in charge of coding the application. Without his support the remix application wouldn't be online and usable during the event. Everything else was ideated and designed by myself, from

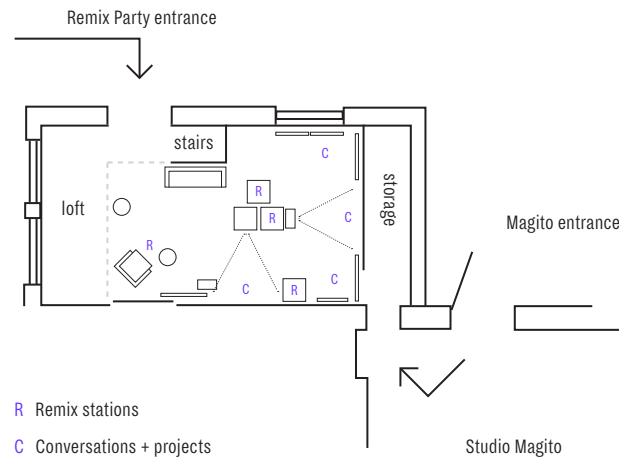
the concept to the visual identity, spatial design, visitor experience and user experience for the remix application.

Remix Party was experimental in a sense that I approached research in a flexible and agile way, testing various research methods. The research was first developed through desk research, discourse analysis, interviews, case studies and by attending an hackathon. During the event I tested action research, a method with which I didn't have much experience. This type of research requires a lot of experimentation, it cannot be applied mechanically, but through intuition and testing.

During the project, as mentioned, I also tried to investigate spatial and educational practises, instead of relying only on visual communication tools. The design of the environment was a big challenge, in particular the design of the space and visitor experience. The visitor experience was planned so that it was not linear, but customised according to the interest of the visitors and to my experience, throughout the event, of what seemed a good narrative. The remix application was also prototyped live during the event, according to the feedback received by the participants.

Visitor experience

The main challenge in shaping the visitor experience was to translate the research and core ideas in an environment. The content had to be simple and easily digestible in a short time and by an audience that didn't necessarily have any experience with visual culture.



During the event I was guiding the visitors through the exhibited material. This consisted of four examples of remix practices by contemporary designers and artists who collect, manipulate and disrupt images. The projects were all quite different from each other, so they enabled different discussions among visitors. Some of the authors did it to investigate internet culture, others to question propaganda, while others again for pure fun.

Along with the exhibited projects, I attached a conversations I had with each author. The interviews were carried out to investigate how the practices started and the motivation behind them (see Chapter 2 – Remix Culture). Some were written in a very informal language, while others had the form of short essays. I intentionally decided not to paraphrase and display them just as I received them. This, I think, kept intact the spirit of the authors, placing the visitor in direct connection with them.



The projects ranged from works that manipulate cultural heritage to others that don't, but I still found interesting as a form of remix. They served as a very straightforward informative layer, illustrating what remix can be. For those who tested the remix application, the projects were also a source of inspiration.

The atmosphere at Remix Party was very positive and informal. I welcomed incoming visitors and guided them through the space as much as possible. In some moments the room was very crowded, so I was not able to give the same attention to everyone.

The visit happened in a very flexible way, rather than giving a long speech I was discussing with people and directing them to different materials according to what they found interesting. Usually after a short tour through the exhibited projects I was introducing the remix prototype.

Some visitors at the beginning were quite insecure about using it, while others went straight to it and took their time to create a remix. The fact that everything happened in one open space, collectively, created interesting dynamics. People were looking at each others remixes and chatting together about the projects.



The Remix Party prototype was accessible during the event on four laptops positioned on three exhibitions stands and a sitting area in the room. The application consists of a basic image editor that allows users to remix a series of historical photographs from the digital archives of Helsinki City Museum.



Image selection and Finnish heritage

The images were selected and exported from Finna.fi after a period of analysis of the content available on the platform. Before the project I had a basic knowledge of how the platform worked. This is due to an hackathon (Hack4FI) that I joined during the winter. The experience at the hackathon allowed me to discover the current state of Finnish digital heritage and meet a local network of Open Knowledge

activists. The institutions that participated presented their digital strategies and the material available for design purposes. Surprisingly not all of them used Finna, some for instance used Flickr or private websites to publish their collections.

Finna.fi on the contrary of other platforms, hosts a wide selection of images from the multiple archives of museums and other cultural institutions in Finland. The images range from works of art, reportages of public events, personal photographs and reproductions of commercial artefacts. The information about the records is quite accurate, with the exception of some artefacts of which the author and timeframe are not known.

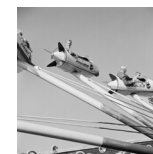
Beside the variety of content and institutions hosted, the choice of using Finna derives from its findability functionalities. The platform allows to search through the archives by selecting different parameters such as time, typology, authors, subject, keywords... . Those parameters derive from the metadata that is registered on the records and can be very useful for directing material to an external application.

Finna is a great resource, but from my short experience with it, I think it needs some further development. Unlike other digital collections, such as Rijksmuseum or Cooper Hewitt, Finna doesn't allow to directly download high resolution images of the records. This I think slows down the fruition of the archive and also discourages the re-use of content. Another negative factor is that a large part of the content that is viewable online is registered with a license that doesn't allow to create derivatives of the original artefact.

This inevitably restricts the possibility of re-appropriation and in my case the choice of material that I could legally use for Remix Party.



The final choice of images for Remix Party fell on twelve private photographs (displayed in the next page). The license of those images allows to share and adapt the artefacts for any purpose, even commercially (CC BY 4.0). The photographs come from different social and historical contexts and have the common characteristic of portraying a gathering of people in a festive moment. I thought this was a very expressive group of images, that people could easily relate to in the context of Remix Party. The fact that all of them are in black and white also gives a certain unity, despite being taken in different moments between 1910-1980 and by different photographers.



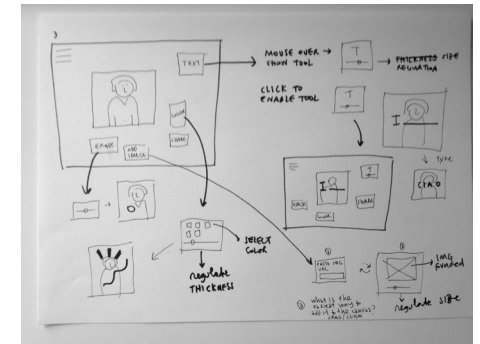
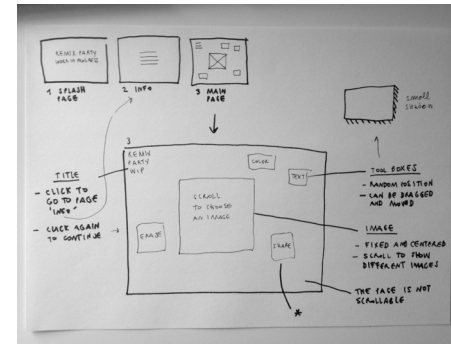
The remix application

The application uses remix tools similar to those that are used on mobile applications to edit images for social sharing. The users can add text, draw with a brush, choose colours and move the image in the frame. The frame has a square shape to allow easy sharing on Instagram, which is nowadays one of the major platforms for sharing photos.

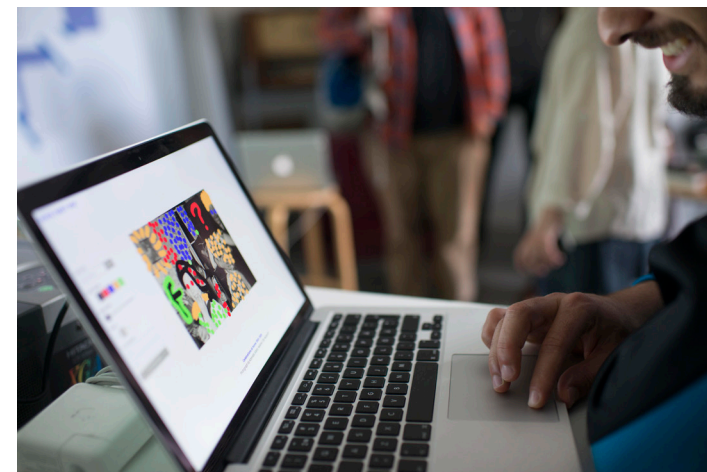
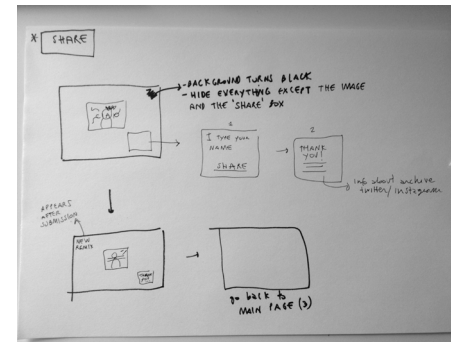
The prototype is Node.js / MongoDB web-app. It was first sketched by me and then quickly coded into a rough prototype by my collaborator Palash. This was used during the event to allow people to practice remix and create re-appropriations of the original photographs.

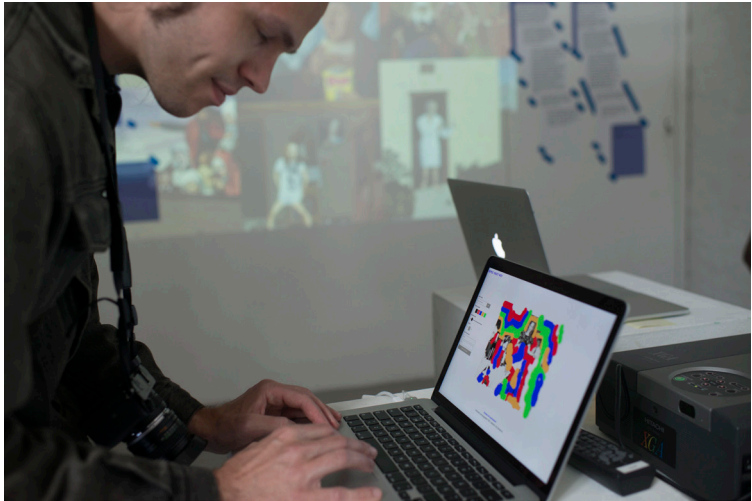
The prototype was then further developed according to the users feedback, in particular on the functionality of the tools. The website was also expanded by adding an “archive of remixes”. This allows to have an overview of the photographs available and also see the images produced by other users. The user can first choose an image to remix and then visit the image editor. The website is still a concept and needs further development in terms of user experience and graphic design. The idea is that the archive of remixes is an unstable archive that grows and reshapes itself as people produce new remixes.

The archive of remixes grows fast, the website already reveals how a single image from the archives can lead to many reproductions with various aesthetics and approaches. The result is a sort of galaxy of remixed images that fluctuate around each other.



The first wireframes of the remix application and below the prototype used during Remix Party.





The visual identity



In the following paragraphs I will briefly describe the visual identity of the project without going too in deep on the design choices. The visual communication was of course an important part of the project, but I think it is not particularly significant in the context of this analysis of Remix Party.

To promote the work in progress event I designed a temporary visual identity that was declined to the communication material, the remix tool and the space itself. The visual identity was then further developed for the final prototype.

The first identity was on purpose quite rough and not so precise, to give a hint of the work in progress aspect of the event. For it I used the typeface Arbitrary and designed the posters and images for social networks by cutting sentences out of the format.

Besides the use of black and white, the colour palette included a bright purple (RGB 102, 51, 255), which was also one of the colours that could be selected for remixing the photographs on the application.

For the posters and other material I used a mix of the images selected from Finna.fi and those from the case studies, which usually had connections with pop culture.

The temporary and final logo for the project. In this case in the form of a profile picture used on social networks.



After the event I was able to spend more time on the logo and visual identity of the remix application. The final logo for Remix Party is composed with **Visual**, a semi-pixelated typeface designed by Jan Novak in 2014.

At this time I also decided to remove the colour purple from the primary palette to give more neutrality to the identity. The colourful remixes produced during the event and its documentation were then used on social networks.

In the following pages are some sketches and layouts of the old and new prototype. The website is still work in progress, but fully functional and usable at <http://remix-party.com/>.

To keep track of the developments of the project it is possible to follow the Twitter page @remixpartywip <https://twitter.com/remixpartywip/>.

ADD TEXT

Type text here

ADD

PICK COLOR

BRUSH SIZE

TOOLS

+

x

FILL THIS OUT

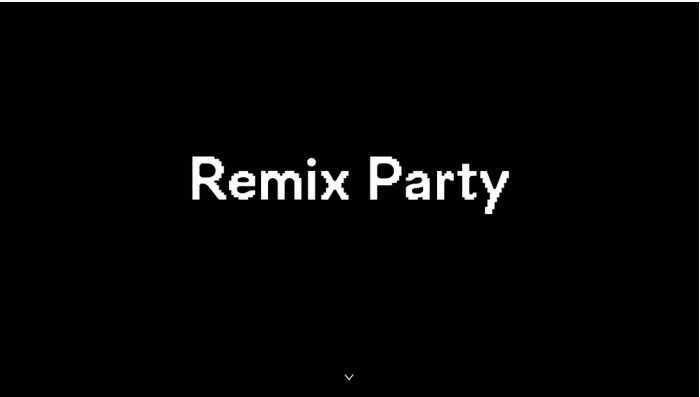
Name

Email

SAVE AND SHARE



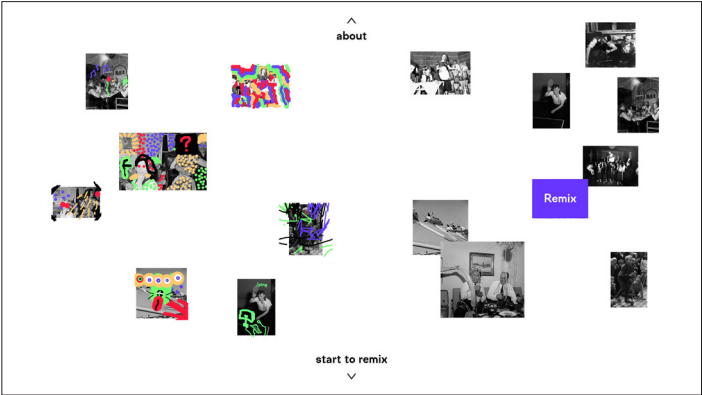
Screenshots from the first prototype of the website, used during the Remix Party at Magito Gallery (June 2016).



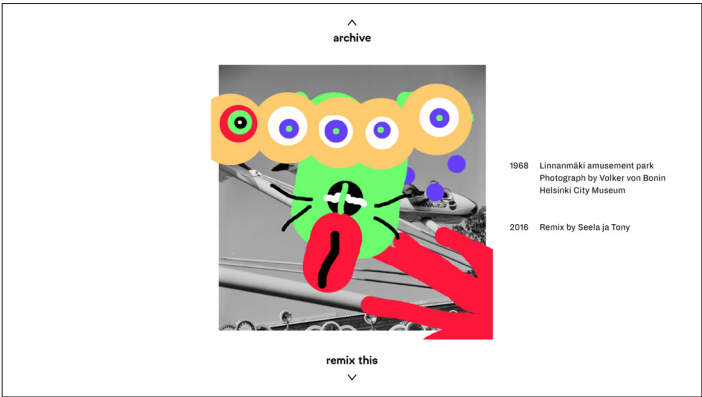
Some of the new layouts for the website, with the application of the new visual identity (August 2016).



One of the first pages with a brief description of the project.



The unstable archive of remixes with floating images. Visit <http://remix-party.com/> to interact with it.



One of the remixes with the timeline of the original photograph and the remix.

The collection of feedback

During the event we documented the visitors experience and opinions with different methods. At the time I had prepared a rough but functional prototype of the remix application which was tested by the visitors. We collected information about it through questioning and by initiating informal chatting. In some cases Palash was adjusting the application by live coding it according to the user feedback. Through photography we were able to document the type of audience that was present, their level of engagement and the environment itself.

We also gave out feedback forms to have a detailed feedback on the usability of the application and people's experience with remix and digital archives. Unfortunately those were compiled by only eight visitors. This happened partially because I was busy explaining the project to visitors, rather than making sure that they would leave a feedback.

Another reason is that the feedback form was too long and should have been planned differently. Instead of a series of open questions that require a lot of time and focus, I could have shaped few of them as dichotomous or multiple choice questions. In the best case scenario I should have designed a specific space in the environment just for the collection of feedback, such as a station for interviews or a space with cultural probes to discuss remix practices and ideas for the usage of Finnish heritage. This could have been an effective way to collect ideas for future developments of the project and perhaps open the project to new collaborators.

Following are the questions of the feedback form and the relative answers.



Did you know that Finna.fi provides free access to material from Finnish museums, libraries and archives? If yes, in which occasion did you visit the website?

5 persons answered NO

2 persons recognised the website, but never used it before

1 person answered YES – often uses the archive for work

Did you try the remix website today?

4 persons answered NO

4 persons answered YES

Which image did you remix?

“Finnair from Linnanmäki”

“The dancing guys”

“The one with the couple dancing and the girl smirking in the front”

Which tools did you use?

Half of the users mentioned that they used the text tool and half the brush.

Describe your remix

“I just typed a text: “Remaining flight to New York - 50 hours” on top of the image from Linnanmäki”

“Funny and dirty sentence, thought unsaid title of the opera”

“It is a mess! And I loved making that mess”

Would you change or add any tools from the remix website?

“More colours or cutting parts of photos away, so you can combine them”

“Make it clearer how to delete”

“I like the oldies feel it has. Maybe it refers to the history of internet and today that is kind of nostalgic already”

“It would be cool to be able to mix two or more images (art + pop culture, maybe own photos). It's a bit hard to use if you can't draw...”

What kind of images would you like to remix next time? (e.g. which era, what typology of images, from which cultural institution...)

“In Finland – iconic Finnish images or shoots from Kaurismäki movies”

“Those were good. Iconography works as well”

“N.A.S.A. pictures, Renaissance paintings, Magnum pictures”

“All kinds...”

“I'd be interested in doing something with the Finnish national image, especially the image people in countryside have”

The project

Do you usually remix/manipulate images on your own? If yes, what kind of images? Which tools/websites do you use? What is the purpose of your remix?

“No, not YET.”

“Yes, I create them for common usage”

“Yes, due to my work. Photoshop mostly”

“Not usually”

“I only use readily-made filters to highlight the colors / light. Sometimes I add face shots of my friend to other random pictures”

“Usually I just highlight colours or change the light, and I use the tools in my computer / phone”

“No, but I could maybe do it in the future – looks fun!”

“No, it has really not occurred to me”

How do you feel about the overall experience at the Remix Party?

“Well done”

“Really nice”

“I love the hanging of the texts! A very interesting subject to study.”

“Very good, fun!”

“Very cool! It was nice to have someone to explain the whole concept”

“For people who use online materials and tools this is probably very useful. For me this is all new and interesting, but I don’t know how to utilise different tools” (this person didn’t try the remix application)

“Very interesting and cool!!”

“This is really inspiring and thought provoking. I’ll definitely check out the remix website!”

Any other comments or suggestions?

“Keep going”

“No. Perfect”

“You should take this to schools / other official institutions as an exhibition!”

“Thank you for the welcoming atmosphere”

“Thank you – This is the most interesting ‘party’ I’ve come across in a long time!”



Findings and final thoughts

In this final section I will discuss the learning outcomes of Remix Party and its possible development in the future.

I started this thesis with the scope of making cultural heritage more accessible by exploring the remix opportunities that digital archives present. During my research I read quite often about the potential of remix in the era of digital heritage. In most cases the idea of remix remained a theory and didn't develop into an actual practice. Remix Party was an attempt to concretise those discourses and give a contribution to the open knowledge activism. Hopefully this thesis will serve as an inspiration for those working within the cultural sector.

Learning outcomes from Remix Party

The experience of action research at Remix Party was constructive and thought me a lot about how to design a visitor experience and collect feedback from it. Reflecting on it afterwards, I believe that some things could have been done differently.

Beside the mentioned problems with the feedback forms, I felt that the exhibition needed more guides. During the event a lot of people visited the space, while I was the only person able to introduce the project and interact with them. Alternatively the guidance could have been supported by more information graphics, such as flyers with an introduction to the subject of remix and some directions to visit the environment independently.

The testing of the prototype went well, people were instinctively using the website without any particular directions. Some people mentioned that the projects exhibited were a good inspiration for

starting their own remix. Perhaps the website in the future should include references of contemporary remix practices and discourses.

Another thing that could be done in the future is to give a sort of 'brief' to the users. For the more hesitant users a theme or direction could be a strategy to break the ice. Another idea for future developments, suggested in the feedback forms, is to allow people to add personal images to the editor. This could enrich Finnish heritage with personal memories.

Overall, I believe that the event Remix Party was a positive experience for the visitors. People seemed engaged and curious about the subject of remix. Many of the visitors enjoyed the selection of Finnish heritage and took their time to test the prototype.

In the future Remix Party could be carried out as a series of workshops with smaller groups of

volunteers. This, on one hand, would allow people to have a deeper experience with remix and perhaps personally select material from the Finnish archives, to start their personal archive of remixes. On the other hand, a restricted audience would make it easier for me to collect feedback and have a in-depth discussion.

Future developments

After this experience with remix practices, I believe that museums and cultural institutions could strongly benefit from a collaboration with remixers. Museums are continuously promoting the re-use cultural heritage, but this is not an easy process and the public needs guidance to do it.

The Finnish digital archives should be more interactive and give inputs to people, so that they can actually make use of digital cultural heritage. The users of digital archives should be

seen as potential future creatives and remixers, so producers of culture rather than just viewers or consumers. Therefore, easy access to high resolution material and the use of licenses that allow remix and commercial use is indispensable. In this context remixers could guide the process of digitization of heritage material by ideating ways of remixing that can be embedded in the digital collections.

Regarding the remix application, I think it needs to be further developed and tested, but the idea is that it could be used by platforms such as Finna.fi as an alternative entry point to their collections.

The concept of Remix Party can be the starting point for developing a set of remix strategies for cultural heritage. In the future the environment and remix tools could be customised according to different collections and audiences.

I could imagine Remix Party being an itinerant environment that visits different cultural

institutions to collaboratively design new ways to enable the content of their archives. Besides images, the material could include forms of immaterial heritage, such as songs and stories.

Reflecting on the research questions of this thesis, I think that the detainers of cultural heritage should not be worried about the lost of “aura” of their collections. Those benefit the most by being disrupted and mixed with the anonymous and low-resolution material that is shared online.

Re-directing cultural heritage towards contemporary digital interactions also implies giving more power of action to the young and unexperienced. Those are probably the real experts at remixing and sharing content.

As mentioned before, the accessibility to remix tools and digital means of communication of the recent years created a new series of cultural opportunities. These should be guided by the

current generation of digital amateurs.

Remix Party in this context can be a point of encounter for remixers and open knowledge activists, of amateurs and experts.

It could grow into a community and act as a consultant for remix practices.

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To conclude I would like to thank

Samir Bhowmik and Zach Dodson
for the precious advises

Palash Mukhopadhyay and Lisa Lee
for their support in the realisation of Remix Party

Juan Arturo Garcia, James Kerr and Cecilia Azcarate
for their availability in discussing their projects

Ossi Kajas
for letting me take over Magito Gallery

the visitors of Remix Party
for their interest, feedback and positive attitude

the distant friends and relatives
for the encouraging postcards

and <http://aaaaarg.fail/>
for sharing books

